Types of Reading
And
Skilled ESL Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Reading is a complex, multi-faced activity involving a combination of both lexical and text-processing skills that are widely recognized as being interactive. This is what most linguists agree upon. Two major approaches have been used for developing reading skills, known as intensive and extensive reading each of which has important roles in helping learners of the English Language to gain comprehension recognition of all its aspects to a great extent, first in the critical area of vocabulary and word recognition, and then in developing better reading comprehension skills.

In this research, it is hypothesized that combining both types of reading in ESL comprehension lessons will, by no doubt, lead to skilled ESL reading comprehension classes and offers a broader system for effective learning strategies that could be of great use to learners of English. The research overviews the basic theories of reading comprehension that show how readers tackle a reading task, how they interpret their reading and what they do when they do not comprehend. The research also illustrates the process of reading as characterized by linguists, and a general description of the basic features of intensive and extensive reading. The research shows, as well, the role and responsibilities of the teacher during ESL lessons and how necessary it is for any teacher to be fully aware of certain goals and aims he or she should accomplish in guiding ESL students during the different phases of the reading process. Teachers should know how to direct the students’ prior knowledge, expectations, and their general linguistic background. The research also mentions and recommends various activities to help improve learning the language.

It is concluded that combining extensive and intensive reading strategies in ESL comprehension lessons serves to reach a successful and effective comprehension process through learning and practicing comprehension skills in a more clearly focused and intentional manners as more of this combinations systematically incorporated into the student’s style of learning strategies. For extensive reading determines knowledge for as much beneficial and meaning topics as possible and consequently strengthens the learner’s mastery of the second language. Intensive reading, on the other hand, focuses on commanding significant vocabulary, grammatical structure, patterns, methods, and processes that help understand the written text. Therefore, the combination of both types helps students adjust reading rate or flexibility, build comprehension and retention skills, develop concentration ability and obtain critical and creative evaluation and insights of the material read.
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Theories of ESL
Reading Comprehension

Many researches and theories have been conducted over the last decades concerning ESL reading comprehension in an attempt to analyze the process, its needs, requirement and basics. Grabe describes of perception of reading comprehension as “…active process of comprehending [where] students need to be taught strategies to read more efficiently (e.g. guess from the context define expectations, make inferences about the text, skim ahead to fill in the context, etc. “(1991, P.773). He developed some useful guidelines for reading programme, which could be modified for more ideal use according to the situation of ESL lessons. The followings are the basic elements he recommends:

1. Reading should be taught in the context of a content – centered integrated skills curriculum, since content provides motivation and integration reinforces learning.
2. Individualized instruction should additionally be provided in reading lab, including a range of skills and strategies (timed reading, vocabulary learning strategies, etc.).
3. Sustained silent reading should be encouraged to develop automaticity, confidence, and enjoyment.
4. Reading lessons should take account of background knowledge through pre-, during, and after-reading tasks.
5. Specific skills should be practiced consistently: the nature of these will depend on the group and goals.
6. Group work and cooperative learning should promote discussions of the readings and explorations of different task solutions and textual interpretations.
7. Students need to read extensively: students need to learn by reading.(ibid, p. 376).

Paran views reading comprehension as “an activity that involves constant guesses which are later rejected or confirmed. This means that one does not read all the sentences but relies on a number of words – or cues – to get an idea of what kind of sentence (e.g. An explanation is likely to follow.” (1993, P.48). Zhang (1993) compares comprehension process to hypothesis testing (or draft-and – revision) where the reader arrives at the main idea after revising the initial hypothesis, provided the reader has adequate background knowledge. (p.48).
Moreover, research and practice in TESOL was greatly influenced by Stephen Krashen’s hypothesis on language acquisition, and particularly the effect of the “Schema theory” on studies dealing with reading comprehension. Today, a growing body of empirical research attests to the role of schemata in EFL/ESL reading comprehension. Most of the research was made on reading comprehension of the first language. However, insights were adapted by to suit the first language reading comprehension strategies. Most important of all, specific attention was given to interactive approaches to reading, which argue that reading comprehension is combination of identification and interpretation skills.

Carrell et al (1989, p.746) conducted a study on two metacognitive strategies, semantic mapping (SM) and the experience-text-relationship (ETR) method, to study their effect on second language reading. In semantic mapping, categories and associations are displayed visually in a diagram. Carrell argues that besides “being effective for vocabulary development, semantic mapping has proved to be good alternative to traditional pre-reading and post-reading activities” (ibid, p.156).

Haller, on the other hand, modeled a number of school-based post-reading activities which enhance learning comprehension through the use of matching exercises, cut-up sentences, and comprehension questions. Haller proposes the use of “paper strips” at the beginning where the student is given the strips and asked to match for example a name and its corresponding activity. Later students can work in pairs as they understand the concept of matching and, finally, the teacher can introduce matching through lines. (2002, p.31-42).
- The Reading Process

Although much literature have been devoted to the process of reading, there is still many questions need to be answered concerning this topic. Reading is not merely a receptive process of picking up information from the page in a word – by – word manner (Grabe, 1991). Rather it is a selective process and characterized as an active process of comprehending. This means that it is an “interactive” process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or (reading fluency).

Grabe (1991), illustrates that during reading, the reader in treats dynamically with the text as she/he tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used: linguistic or systematic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) as well as schematic knowledge (through top- down processing). P.98.

Since reading is a complex process, block (1981) states the significance of widening the knowledge about it as he emphasizes the fact that good readers tend to use a wider range of strategies with higher frequency than poor readers do. (P.92). It is a multi – faceted activity, involving a combination of both lexical and text – progressing skills that are widely recognized as being interactive.

Carrell and Eisterhold (1981) view reading as a “guessing game” in which the reader reconstructs, ad best as he can. A message which has been encoded by a writer. “(P.504). Therefore it is an interactive process between a reader and a text which leads to automacity or(reading fluency ). In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as he/ she tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used. They outline the processes involved in this interactive process where bottom –up and top-down processing occur simultaneously at all levels .(p.505).

- Types of Reading

- Extensive Reading

There have been conflicting definitions of the term “extensive reading” (Hedge, 1983, P.47). Some use it to refer to kind of “skimming and scanning activities, others associate it to the quantity of material.Hedge believes that extensive reading varies according to the students’ motivations and school resources .A well motivated and trained teacher will be able to choose suitable materials of handouts and activity books for the students .He also states that since extensive reading helps in developing reading ability , it should be built in
EFL/ESL programs provided the selected texts are authentic –i.e.” not written for language learners and published in the original language “.(p.٨١٨)

Hafiz and Tudor state that:

\[\text{The pedagogical value attributed to extensive reading is based on the assumption that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and interesting material will, in long run, produce a beneficial effect on the learners command of L₂. (٤٩٤, P.٥).}\]

Extensive reading, therefore, assures to flood readers and learners of the language with large quantities of second language input with specific tasks to perform on the material.

Inspired by Krashan’s Input hypothesis researchers have shown renewed interest in extensive reading in recent years. This is seen most clearly in various trends adopted by ELT institutions. Students are urged to read independently by using the resources within their reach (Hedge, ٨٠٠, P.٩٠٠ – ٩٠٢). Besides, there has been a growing interest in researching the value of extensive reading. Hedge believes that extensive reading varies according to students motivation and resources. A well motivated and trained teacher will be able to choose suitable handouts or books for the students. Hedge (٦٠٠) also states that since extensive reading helps in developing reading ability, it should be built into an EFL/ESL programmes provided that the selected texts are “authentic – i.e.” not written for language learners and published in original language” (P.٨١٨).

Hedge (٦٠٠), however, argues that it is difficult to know exactly how any learner will actually use the input available “(P.٩٠٤). No one can deny the fact that extensive reading helps greatly in “exposing” SL learners to English and especially when the class time is limited. Hedge briefs the advantages of extensive reading in the following lines:

Learners can built their language competence progress in their reading ability become more independent in their studies, acquire cultural knowledge, and develop confidence and motivation to carry on learning. (ibid, P.٩٠٤-٩٠٥).

٣-٤ The Intensive Reading

In intensive (or creative) reading, students usually read a page to explore the meaning and to be a granted with writing mechanisms. Hedge argues that it
is “only through more extensive reading that learners can gain substantial practice in operating these strategies more in dependently on a range of materials. “(ibid, P.٢٠٢). These strategies can be either text – related or learner – related: the former includes and awareness of text organization while the latter includes strategies like linguistic, schematic, and met cognitive.

In intensive reading activities learner are in the main exposed to relatively short texts which are used either to exemplify specific aspects of the lexical, syntactic or discoursal system of the L٢, or to provide the basis for targeted reading strategy practice .Intensive reading emphasizes the fact that “the knowledge a reader brings to a text is a principal determiner of how that text is comprehended , and what may be learned and remembered ” ( Gabb ,٢٠٢٠ , p.٢٣).

Paran (٢٠٢٠) clearly characterizes the type of intensive reading program texts and processes teachers need to focus on to maximize the familiar three phases of pre- during and post – reading with better language preparation, retention and activation stratergies to improve learning. Intensive reading focuses more intentionally on essential core vocabulary, patterns of text organization and types of text processing needed to comprehend and text, (P.٤٠)

Intensive reading’s basics priorities are: to help learners comprehend written texts, to be come more aware of text organization to better comprehend it, to learn how to use and monitor effective reading strategies, and to develop general literacy skills necessary to generate productive expressions in L٢ (ibid, P.٤٠).Through intensive reading , ESL are also encouraged to synthesize , i.e , take the relevant key ideas or concepts from a text , create necessary mental images , combine those with prior knowledge in order to infer meanings that may not be explicitly stated by the author .Consequently , students will think about the new information in ways the reader had not engaged before .

In this way , learners of the language go beyond simply making sense of the words to understand the author’s meaning , absorbing or challenging relevant concepts , and sparking in the reader’s new ideas or new paths of inquiry .As much as the students read , they are generally capable of articulating and sharing with others their newfound knowledge or ideas either verbally , through writing , or by some means. They become aware of the elements of comprehending and understanding any text , such understanding make the form of a new kind of empathy for the characters or the situation , or any awakening to a new world of thought not encountered before .
Combining Intensive and Extensive Reading Strategies

Loucky (2002) lists in a table the main strategies of the two types of reading in an attempt to show a broader system for effective learning strategies that could be of great use for learners of the English language. (P. 531)

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<tr>
<th>Intensive Reading Skills</th>
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<tr>
<td>A Word recognition</td>
<td>A Self-chosen materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>B Meaning comprehension skills</td>
<td>B Broader cross-cultural content encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Focused development of vocabulary grammar, and study skills</td>
<td>C Faster reading to increase speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Comprehending details Vs main ideas</td>
<td>D Analytical reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Understand literal Vs inferential data</td>
<td>E Synthetic comparative reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Understanding patterns of organization</td>
<td>F Improved motivation for L2 reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Transitional Vs relational words</td>
<td>G Greater entertainment &amp; enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Understanding author’s bias &amp; purpose</td>
<td>H Wider range reading for pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Reading to increase reading speed \1. scanning to locate specific information . \2. skimming for main general ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Encourages repeated encounters (shown to be needed for acquisition of new vocabulary)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Often uses simplified texts &amp; exercises</td>
<td>K Stress on using authentic reading</td>
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Teacher’s role during reading

Most linguists during the last decades state that any reading component of an English course may include a set of learning goals. This is, by no doubt, proves to be true as far as reading comprehension is concerned, Hedge (2002) mentions the followings:

- The ability to read a wide range of texts in English. This is the long-term goal most teachers seek to develop.
- Building a knowledge of language which will facilitate reading ability.
- Building schematic knowledge.
- The ability to adapt the reading style according to reading purpose (i.e., skimming, scanning).
- Developing an awareness of structure of written texts in English.
- Taking a critical stance to the contents of the texts.

It is the teacher’s responsibility to make his/her students fully aware of the above goals. Teachers should motivate reading by selecting the appropriate materials and especially for early stages of learning.

Abraham (2002) emphasizes the role of the teacher in most reading strategies demand the teacher’s task in helping “students recognize the knowledge that they already have about the topic of a text”. (P.7), i.e., through discussion of titles, subheadings, photographs, identifying text structure, etc.

Haller (2002, P.12-42) illustrates the significance of the teachers role through modeling a number of reading activities which enhance reading comprehension the teacher should guide his/her students in all the phases of the reading process, pre-while, and after. He/she guide and monitor prior knowledge, predictions, expectation, and general linguistic background.

Grabe (1991) developed some useful guidelines for reading programmes used in second or foreign language situation. These include the following seven general principles:

1. Reading should be taught in the context of a content – centered integrated skills curriculum. Since content provides motivation and integration rain forces learning.
2. Individualized instruction should additionally be provided in a reading lab, including a range of skills and strategies (timed reading, vocabulary learning strategies, etc.).
3. Sustained silent reading should be encouraged and developed automaticity. Confidence and enjoyment.

4. Reading lessons should take account of background knowledge through pre-reading, and after-reading tasks.

5. Specific skills should be practiced consistently: the nature of these will depend on the group and goals.

6. Group work and cooperative learning should promote discussion of the reading and explorations of different task solutions and textual interpretations.

7. Students need to read extensively: students need to learn by reading. (Grabe, 1991, p. 573).

ESL/EFL teachers should help learners focus on and practice beneficial strategies for improving their vocabulary, reading skills and fluency. Meaningful lessons plan which strategies to teach and practice with students, as various strategies are needed at different stages of lexical and text-processing. As Ahoder (2002) commented, “promoting active mindful reading and teaching students to use strategies is every teacher’s responsibility.” (P. 214).

Four strategies most appropriate to use before reading a selection are:
- Acquiring critical core vocabulary (High frequency key words).
- Activating prior knowledge.
- Previewing the selection.
- Setting a purpose for reading. (ibid, P. 49)

Various arrangements may be used during reading, such as guided, silent, paired, choral, echo reading. Strategies which improve learners comprehension and critical thinking skills include post-reading activities and strategies that help learners better review, analyze, reflect and respond to texts they have read.
Conclusion

Clearly there are many educational benefits to students when intensive and extensive reading strategies are combined. Students are encouraged to sense free reading in a natural and social environment. Such environment will provide students with motivation for reading and comprehending as well. In combining the two types of reading, teachers of English language will surely find a big variety of educational phases to support them in accomplishing their goals. They can benefit from the basic features of intensive reading in emphasizing the total awareness of vocabulary, its form, meaning, and role in developing the comprehension skills.

The students are encouraged to differentiate between understanding details and understanding main ideas which consequently would lead to comprehending literal data as opposed to inferential data. Intensive reading assures as well, the process of comprehending the patterns of organizing the text in terms of words and meaning. By this, students will reach a state where they can see a clear picture of the writer’s bias and his purpose behind writing the text.

Add to this what extensive reading provides students with. It supplies the students with a wider range of reading different topics and stressing on authentic reading which offers the reader greater pleasure and enjoyment while reading. In extensive reading, the students are let to choose freely the material they want to read in an attempt to encourage the activity of reading materials and topics characterized by a broader cultural content and reach a synthetic comparative reading. Extensive reading enables student to achieve independency by reading the material they want in consideration to content, level of difficulty, and length and they are promoted to learn how to increase their reading speed through which, by sure, they learn how to locate certain information to help them reach the main and basic ideas.

Finally, the combination of the two types of reading in ESL comprehension lessons will lead to a real communication and reinforce knowledge about the information presented in any written text and lead the students to a well-integrated balanced and effective analysis of reading comprehension lessons.
References


